

Book Review

Applied Social Psychology Minus the Application

J. Kremer, N. Sheehy, J. Reilly, K. Trew, & O. Muldoon. *Applying Social Psychology*. New York: Palgrave, 2003. ISBN: 0-333-77617-8 (245 pp., \$24.95).

Applying Social Psychology is a textbook for undergraduate Applied Social Psychology courses. The authors cover application of social psychology to environmental issues, work, health, conflict, communication, education, consumerism, crime, and sport. Topically, this is much the same ground covered by excellent texts such as Oskamp and Schultz's (1998) *Applied Social Psychology*, Schultz and Oskamp's (2000) *Social Psychology: An Applied Perspective*, and Sadava and McCreary's (1997) edited volume also titled *Applied Social Psychology*. Though topically similar, I cannot recommend *Applying Social Psychology* with the same enthusiasm as I afford the other aforementioned texts.

The authors introduce the book with a discussion of Lewin's dictum "there is nothing so practical as a good theory," with the clarification "that there is also nothing so good for theory as sound practice and application." Indeed, one strength of this volume is its broad theoretical coverage. However, the case for practice and application informing theory is neglected. I expected several examples but found little compelling evidence in this regard.

Most chapters begin with a "once upon a time" section providing examples of the "type of situation which a student could encounter." Many of the examples, such as running a red light because the student was late for class and a student deciding what to do with an unexpected windfall, did not strike me as particularly relevant. Further, the authors rarely link these stories to the material in the chapter. Other texts present far more relevant examples, such as teenage pregnancy, HIV risk, and divorce, and clearly link examples to social psychological theory and research.

Each chapter includes sections presenting the history of research on the topic, contemporary research issues, applicable theories and principles, practical applications, and future research directions. The historical overview and theory sections

are the strongest of most chapters. Though the history and theory sections are effective, most chapters rely heavily on summaries of relevant books or review articles. This approach puts a great distance between the text and primary sources of applied social psychology research. A review of the references indicates a disappointing number of references to empirical journal articles. One notable exception is a chapter on sports psychology wherein the authors give considerable attention to relevant sports psychology research. Not surprisingly, this chapter stands as the book's strongest and most interesting. Further, since sports psychology is not covered in the texts mentioned earlier, this is a valuable contribution and a good introduction to the field.

The relative lack of empirical research coverage leads me to my strongest negative criticism of the text. The text simply fails to devote enough space to applications of social psychology. Instead of discussing salient examples, much of the focus is on suggesting areas where theory *might* be applied. I found this particularly frustrating. There are many fascinating examples of application, but the authors provide few detailed examples. The lack of illustrative examples is a major shortcoming throughout the text.

One example of this shortcoming comes from the chapter on peace and conflict. The authors do well in detailing the contributions of perspectives such as social identity theory and the contact hypothesis. However, the chapter's section on practical applications includes only three paragraphs, focusing primarily on the Jigsaw Classroom. Given the author's geographic location (Ireland), I was surprised that they did not address research on the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Northern Ireland. A well-placed and current example would make for a more interesting and relevant presentation.

When the authors do provide applied examples, there is little depth offered. In one instance, the authors mention a "fascinating" example wherein social psychologists devised successful and innovative sales techniques using approaches derived from cognitive dissonance theory, reactance theory, and the foot-in-the-door technique. This reference is to the work of the Uruguayan psychologist Jacobo Varela (1971). I know this work and it is, as the authors state, fascinating. The authors tell the reader that the work is fascinating, but they manage to leave out all of the details that make the work so interesting.

Applying Social Psychology does a good job at presenting theory and history but falls short in discussing application. This perhaps ignores the most appealing aspect of the field and, ultimately, the examples that spark further interest in applied social psychology.

Christopher L. Aberson
Humboldt State University

Book Review

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CHRIS ABERSON (cla18@humboldt.edu) is assistant professor of psychology at Humboldt State University. His primary research areas are prejudice, affirmative action, and the development of interactive tutorials to teach statistics.